



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

CEREMONIAL SPITTING.

THAT a volume might be filled with citations of cases of ceremonial spitting is familiar to every ethnologist. So large a body of material need not be presented in any study of the significance of the rite. Its origins are probably includible in a short paper. Three suggestions are presented here for consideration.

I.

Bulwer-Lytton, in the amphitheater scene in the *Last Days of Pompeii*, makes the furious and frenzied Calenus carry the day against Arbaces by going into convulsions and shouting "A god! a god! I feel the god rush to my lips!" This view of epileptic and convulsive seizures is world-wide, and is familiar enough in general literature, classical and modern. But since foaming at the mouth as well as tremors, prove to the primitive mind the presence of some superhuman agency, the conclusion is easily reached that inspiration or obsession is readily communicable by means of the saliva of the convulsed or inspired person. This hardly means that the effect has been everywhere taken for the cause; rather would it appear to be an illustration of the failure of primitive minds clearly to dissociate matter and spirit in their thinking—a leading factor in all animistic beliefs. Two sharply defined, independent realms are, I think, not at all conceived at first, and because of this fact, mysterious powers of inspired or holy men are widely

considered communicable by some form of physical contact, just as heat and cold, or color of inks, or dyes, may be communicable.

So in the Semitic world, the *baraka* or "blessing," the mysterious powers of a holy or inspired man, are communicated by the saliva. At initiation into a dervish order the sheikh or head of the order spits on the hands and forehead of the candidate; among the Rufaiyeh the custom is to spit in the candidate's mouth.¹ The like custom is general throughout North African states; every candidate for "holy orders" and every suppliant of a holy man, is likely to have his mouth spit in, as a token of divine favor.² So in Central Africa the head priest of the Warua spits in the face of any inquirer whom the god delighteth especially to honor.³ I doubt if in this case, however, any special powers are acquired by the recipient. In the cuneiform literature the same conception is prominent. The word of a god comes upon a man, and is indicated by shivers or tremors of the *bārū*, "seer," or *sha'ilu*, "necromancer" or medium.

We read of Bêl Marduk,⁴

"His word is brought upon the *bārū*, and that *bārū* shivers.

His word is brought upon the *sha'ilu*, and that *sha'ilu* shivers.

His word is brought upon the *idlu* (youth?) in woe(?) and that freeman moans.

His word is brought upon the maiden, and that maiden moans."

Jastrow⁵ cites fifteen lines about Nergal, in which the above also occurs. He thinks some plague is meant. I

¹ Bliss, *Religions of Modern Syria and Palestine*, 218.

² Montet, "Le culte des saints dans l'Islam," *Hibbert Journal*, July, 1909.

³ Cameron, *Across Africa*, 315.

⁴ Banks, *Sumerisch-babylonische Hymnen*, 9.

⁵ *Die Religionen Babyloniens und Assyriens*, 475-6.

doubt if that is the only effect of the "word of Nergal" that is intended. The passage I quote describes fairly what any one may see in a seance to-day in America, when a medium is going "under control," and is interesting as indicating transition from the cult and inquiry of the dead to a conceived greater power, a king of the dead, as both Bêl and Nergal are sometimes conceived. Compare Ezekiel's dumb seizures and David's slobbering madness. The process of communication is the same. Take this specimen:⁶

"The *ashipu shangumahhu* of Ea am I,
 The messenger of Marduk am I;
 To revive the sick man
 The great Lord Ea hath sent me.
 He hath added his pure spell to mine,
 He hath added his pure voice to mine,
 He hath added his pure spittle to mine,
 He hath added his pure prayer to mine."

It is a fair conclusion that this ancient Semitic physician, priest or exorcist received inspiration by having his mouth spit in, at ordination, like his modern confrères. The purifying power of spittle, especially of the gods, is familiar in ancient Egyptian texts, the spittle of Horus and Set⁷ suggesting that of Marduk and Nergal. In Mark vii. 33, Jesus spits and touches the tongue of a stutterer—I suspect with saliva—to give fluency of speech.

This power of spittle to impart the gift of speech is very prominent in folk-tales. Miss Cox cites fourteen tales from Russia, Scotland, Hungary, South Africa, Poland, India, Germany and Scandinavia, in which spittle will speak when spat upon the ground and questioned; or, since in most cases some object spat upon thus acquires the gift of speech, perhaps we should conclude that the

⁶ Thompson, *Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia*, 13.

⁷ Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*.

earth acquired this power when spat upon, in older forms of the tales. "In the Edda, the spittle of waves was shaped by the gods into a man, whose blood, when he was slain, was mixed with honey and made into mead of which if a man drink he becomes a poet and a sage."⁸ In this case three familiar sources of inspiration, spittle—perhaps of a sea god—blood-drinking and mead-drinking, have been fused into one myth. In the *Folk Tales of the Magyars* (p. xxxiii) the fairy Helena confers the gift of speech upon the floor, the door handle and the hinge, by spitting upon them.

Among the Zulus, the diviner infuses power or vitality into his divining sticks or chips—substitutes for ancestral bones—by spitting upon them. They then leap about, and by their motions reveal to him anything he wants to know.⁹ The like custom in using the divining bones is widespread in Africa; and the superstitious negro "crap shooter" in our own land still attaches importance to his spitting in "throwing the bones."

In Africa we find this same deputation of authority by spitting. Old Katchiba, appointing his brother as guardian and deputy weather clerk for Sir Samuel White Baker on leaving Obbo, breaks a branch from a tree, spits upon it several times, and lays it on the ground. A fowl is dragged around it, and rubbed over the feet of Baker's horse before being sacrificed. The "blessed branch" is then given to Katchiba's brother. With this magic wand, and a rain-whistle of antelope's horn hung upon his neck, he enters upon his duties. Later, Katchiba learned that Baker and his wife were sick. Liberally "blessing" a branch and waving it about their heads, he then stuck it in the thatch over the door of the hut as a guardian power; evidently the evil could not return while this strong armed

⁸ *Cinderella*, p. 518, note 69.

⁹ Callaway, *Religious System of the Amazulu*, 330.

spirit kept the house. As the sick people undoubtedly recovered, who can deny the potency of a branch so blessed?¹⁰

Fetish-making, as every ethnologist knows, is inducing a spirit to take up its residence in some convenient object which the maker or buyer then carries about with him for his own protection against other powerful spirits. It is natural then for the African in many cases to conclude his process of manufacture by spitting upon the magical device, and the value of the rite depends upon the rank of the spitter. Thus in making the great traveling or war fetish in Garenganze, the final step is the spitting upon it by the king.¹¹ To be classed with this process probably, is the custom among the neighboring Barotse, of protecting an article from thieves by spitting on straws, and sticking them around it.¹² But this may mean that the straws thus acquire the gift of speech and will betray any thief.

Comparable with Katchiba's "blessing" a bough with "holy water," cited above, is the experience of Captain Stigand at a Rendile festival. Every one is expected to have the branch of a certain bush fixed upon his hut upon such occasions, so two elderly masters of ceremonies brought the English captain a bough and spat upon it; and added thereto a spitting upon his hands by way of benediction.¹³

II.

The spitting of reverence is one of the most wide-spread of customs. Daniel Crawford, in *Thinking Black*, several times speaks of the African as trained in "the university of the beasts." Carl Lumholtz in his *Unknown Mexico* describes dances to produce rain which the Indian claims

¹⁰ Baker, *Albert Nyansa*, 207, 211, 250.

¹¹ Arnot, *Garenganze*, p. 207.

¹² Declé, *Three Years in Savage Africa*, 72.

¹³ *To Abyssinia Through an Unknown Land*, 101-2.

were taught him by the deer, the turkey, etc. In *New Trails in Mexico*, the "Frog Doctor" teaches rain making; that is to say, the curious behavior of some animals before a rain is construed as a cause, not as an effect. It is a rigid application of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, and so in various parts of the world animals behaving oddly before a rain acquire a reputation for rain making. In like manner, the animal mode of expressing affection does not pass unnoticed. "If I were a cow with a long tongue, I would lick you all over," said an African chief to John Campbell¹⁴ by way of welcome. So we have courteous greeting by way of licking or spitting all through Africa, and a logical expansion into ceremonial worship. Dr. Nassau tells us that in West Africa one blows, puffs, or spits a blessing upon the head or hand of a child, so that the word *tuwaka* may be understood to be "bless" as well as "spit."¹⁵ In modern West African custom it is commonly a sharp puffing with no emission of saliva, suggesting transition into "breathing a blessing"; but the name for it, "spitting," remains. Among various tribes in South Africa when a child is born various sacred herbs are hung up at the door of the hut, and every visitor to the babe must chew some of these, and spit or puff at the child. A mother absent from her child a short time chews some herbs hung around the child's neck and puffs at it.¹⁶

Dr. Schweinfurth¹⁷ saw the spitting rite as expressive of fidelity, reverence or attachment, only two or three times while in Africa and thought the custom dying out; but in other parts of the continent it is still in full vigor. In Dinka Land an English official may be met by native chiefs who crawl to him on all fours and spit in the palm of his hand by way of showing good faith. Another form

¹⁴ *Travels in South Africa*, II, 185.

¹⁵ *Fetichism in West Africa*, 99, 213.

¹⁶ *Savage Childhood*, 16, 44.

¹⁷ *The Heart of Africa*, I, 205.

is to lick the palm of his hand.¹⁸ Compare the fact that the son of an African chief may speak of himself as "father's little dog" and the inference is fair that the behavior of a suppliant dog suggested this rite of submission, or the like one of licking or kissing the feet, common in some parts of South Africa and a commonplace in Assyrian royal inscriptions. Among the Nuehr, the salutation is to spit in the face for especial honor. In case of ordinary salutations between friends the hand is held up with spread fingers at the height of one's head, and the friend spits in it.¹⁹ Mr. Petherick in the same region tells of his first experience with the custom. A Nuehr chieftain entered the cabin of his steamer, knelt, and grasped the trader's right hand, spat in it, then full in the white man's face. Astounded, but seeing only benignity in the black face before him, the trader restrained the impulse to knock him down and returned the compliment with great fervor, much to the delight of the old chief, who was thereby assured that Petherick himself was a man of the highest rank.

It is easy to see that if the custom itself is construed as a token of kindness, affection, or favor, it will be esteemed in proportion to the rank of the spitter. There is no difficulty in understanding the esteem of such favors where no peculiar powers are believed transmitted thereby. Thus in Unyoro at a marriage, the priest of the Bachwezi, or ancestral spirits, spits upon the heads of the pair kneeling before him by way of blessing them. The subsequent rite of killing a sheep, blessing it, presenting some of the meat to the ancestor and some to the kneeling pair, following with a like communion with a cup of banana wine, strongly suggests Christian influence,²⁰ which the presence of Gallas as Unyoro herdsmen would explain, since Chris-

¹⁸ Mrs. Stevens, *My Soudan Year*, 134-136.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

²⁰ A. B. Lloyd, *Uganda to Khartoum*, 52.

tianity once had a foothold among the mountain Gallas of Abyssinia,²¹ who still retain a baptismal rite and eucharist, though heathen in all other respects. An infant in Unyoro is blessed at birth by being brought to the priest for him to spit upon.

Similarly, among the Nubas, the priest blesses a child by spitting upon its chest, and there is a christening ceremony in which the child and the relatives are sprinkled by means of a slain chicken dipped in water, and then spitting upon the child.²²

The very word "spitting" may be used as a synonym for "blessing," or gift. Among the Thonga a groom will probably pay for his wife in cattle, but he may add to the stipulated cattle a present of one sovereign to the bride's father, saying "This is my spitting for you, my father."²³

Throughout Marotseland, spitting is universal at greeting or parting, and enters into pledges of fidelity and business contracts to some extent, as may readily be inferred. But only children of royalty or near relatives may enjoy the great blessing of being spat on by the king. Declé remarks that actual emission of saliva is unusual; Marotse spitting is merely ceremonial. The distinctions of rank are sharply drawn in spitting; Brazilian Indian chiefs are known to spit in hands of attendants or associates.²⁴ So the king of Uganda expresses pleasure with those who salute him by blowing and spitting in their hands, which the ardent loyalist promptly rubs on his face and eyes.²⁵ Spitting is also the chief feature in a Makoba chief's blessing.²⁶

²¹ Krapf, *Travels in East Africa*, 378, 385.

²² Mrs. Stevens, *My Soudan Year*, 274, 277.

²³ Junod, *Life of a South African Tribe*, I, 119.

²⁴ Declé, *op. cit.*, 77; Coillard, *On the Threshold of Central Africa*, 311-12, 369, 394, 469, 524.

²⁵ Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, I, 252.

²⁶ Chapman, *Travels*, I, 160, 194.

It is clear that amongst a people more democratic or less centralized in organization such salutations are mutual; the rite does not become a mark of rank. So among the Masai and neighboring Wachaga, spitting or spirting water upon each other at meeting, parting, receiving presents, making brotherhoods, or pledges of eternal friendship, in closing contracts, is everywhere in evidence. At closing a trade each man spits upon the article he barter away.²⁷ The Wachaga kill a sheep or goat in their brotherhood ceremony, each party solemnly spitting on its head; or they spit milk or beer in each other's mouths. The primitive affectionate "cowslick" and "puppy love" could hardly be carried further than it is by these nomadic pastoral peoples. The Akikuyu also spit in all ceremonies of respect and reverence.²⁸

Probably derived from this licking or spitting as a mark of respect or esteem is the custom of spitting on the food or drink one offers to an honored guest, especially prominent in some parts of the Malay Archipelago; or the guest's spittle will be a mark of his own esteem. St. John²⁹ tells of his hospitable reception in a Dyak village. His visit being of good omen for the simple villagers, they bring balls of rice for him to spit on, which they eagerly swallow. Not so easily endured by the civilized visitor is the reverse custom, as on the occasion when the American General Bates and his staff paid a diplomatic visit to the dowager Sultana of Sulu. When refreshments were brought in, one of the chieftains gravely spat a mouthful of betelnut juice in the bowl of liquor provided, which mark of royal favor the visitors were expected to appreciate very highly.

Another interesting advance upon the spitting at greet-

²⁷ Hinde, *Last of the Masai*, 42-43; Thomson, *Through Masai Land*, 166, 368-69, 379-81, 443; Johnston, *Kilimanjaro Expedition*, 438; Dawson, *James Hamington*, p. 366; Krapf, *Travels in East Africa*, 211, 279.

²⁸ Stigand, *Land of Zinj*, 237.

²⁹ St. John, *Life in the Forests of the Far East*, I, 148, 150.

ing or parting may be cited from the Boloki. When a son or daughter is about to travel for any reason, the father chews a certain shrub and spits on a leaf, mixing with it a little camwood powder. The wayfarer takes this mess with him and rubs a little of it on his body daily, to find favor and success wherever he travels. No son or daughter will venture to travel without this paternal blessing.³⁰

Perhaps we should group with this reverential spitting the curious Tibetan salutation of thrusting out the tongue; the farther, the more polite or submissive the intention. If beaten in battle, the Tibetan will signify surrender by squatting down and hanging out his tongue; suggesting the behavior of a tired dog. I have seen no ventured explanation of the origin of this custom. But the dog is an ancient sacred animal with the Tibetans. They rejoice at the prospect of being eaten by one when they die and its own stuffed skin is hung up at a doorway or from the ceiling of a room, that its guardian spirit may continue to protect the family. It may be, then, that the hanging out the tongue was originally an imitation of the behavior of a tired or amicably disposed sacred dog. The point is not pressed.

III.

The spitting of worship will be recognized as an inevitable consequence of this spitting of salutation. The gods or ancestors will secure the same marks of respect that are shown to men. The very word "spitting" may be used to express "worship," as among the Balubale, where *kupara*, "worship," is literally "spitting" or "spouting," and the name emphasizes the spirting of herb juice, holy water, or consecrated beer upon the ground, upon all present, and upon the ancestral bones to revive and invigorate the patron ancestral spirits. All present drink after this

³⁰ Weeks, *Among Congo Cannibals*, 307.

solemn libation.³¹ In West Africa a thin veneer of Mohammedanism has been spread over African paganism. The black Moslem may be seen greeting the autumnal new moon by spitting in his hand and waving it three times around his head,³² a custom really identical with kissing the hand to the new moon, condemned in Job xxxi. 26-28, or the Fijian custom of tapping the mouth with the hand when first seeing the new moon.

This form of salutation of the moon is still known in witch lore in Italy. Leland cites a spell in his *Aradia* (p. 44):

“.....But I drinking
In this horn, and drinking the blood,
The blood of Diana with her aid,
My hand to the new moon I kiss
That she may guard my grapes
At the moment the bud is formed,
At the time of the grapes growing,
And at last at the gathering, etc., etc.”

In South Africa the same form of worship may be found. The Ama-Zulu, or “Celestial People” celebrate annually in the month of January the festival of first fruits. As the chief comes forth from his dwelling at the moment of sunrise, he spits at the sun three or four times.³³ This was thought by the French missionary Arbousset to be intended as an insult, African customs being new to him. Livingstone³⁴ is to be credited with a like error. He tells us that the Bakwains on seeing a crocodile at once spit on the ground, saying “There is sin.”

The error here is doubtless one of translation. Livingstone labored among the Bakwains, or Ba-quaina, “people of the crocodile” whose totem, or *siboko*, is the crocodile, and knew their superstitious regard for it. The

³¹ Crawford, *Thinking Black*, 260.

³² Reade, *Savage Africa*, 355.

³³ Arbousset, *Exploratory Tour*, 232.

³⁴ *Travels and Researches in South Africa*, 277.

word he translated "sin" was probably more nearly expressible by "tabu." The spitting was undoubtedly reverential, as it is with South African totem clans generally. We may compare the superstition still found in Yorkshire that when you meet a white horse you must spit, or ill luck will befall you.³⁵

The horse cult of the ancient Teutons, "lords of the white horse" as Tennyson calls them, is familiar to scholars, and this Yorkshire practice may be a survival of an ancient form of obeisance or salutation.

Returning to Africa, the Baperi, who reverence and swear by the porcupine, are grieved if any one kills or maltreats the animal. They then collect its quills, spit upon them, rub their eye-brows with them, and lament: "They have slain our brother, our master, one of ours, him whom we sing."³⁶

So among the Damara, or Ova-Herrero, whose primitive fire-cult is less obscured by change than that of most African tribes, a hunter never returns from a successful hunt without filling his mouth with water and spirting it at the ancestral fire, as well as three times over his own feet.³⁷ It is probably a simple obeisance or libation. Among the Lighoyas and other Basuto tribes, there is much fear of the lightning, and a marked effort to control clouds and storms through the *morimo*, or ancestral spirits. At a sharp unexpected clap of thunder, one of a frightened group may ask his fellows: "Is there any one here who devours the wealth of others?" All then spit upon the ground, saying "We do not devour the wealth of others."³⁸ The formal spitting strengthens the solemn asseveration; as in covenant making, it seems equivalent to an oath. The American negro voodooist still superstitiously regards the

³⁵ Henderson, *Folk Lore of the Northern Counties*, 116.

³⁶ Arbousset, *op. cit.*, 257.

³⁷ Anderson, *Lake Ngami*, 221.

³⁸ Arbousset, *op. cit.*, 323.

behavior of the fire on his hearth; and if it snaps, sparkles, or gives out other evil omens he promptly spits in it,³⁹ which may be compared with the Damara fire-cult above cited.

This cultus-spitting must include the world-wide custom of spitting on a stick or stone which one deposits upon an ancestral cairn. It is a familiar fact that these are often only cenotaphs, or wayside erections for any wandering spirits—the original form of the crosses and chapels at European roadsides. All over South Africa they may be seen—piles of brush, poles, or stones, within a few feet of the wayside. Every passer adds a stone or green branch, which he devoutly spits on, and prays for prosperity in his journey. Neglect of these *issivivani* is sure to entail misfortune,⁴⁰ and the average Kaffir will spit on a stone and throw one into every stream he crosses as an offering to the water spirits. He will spirt a mouthful of water in the direction of his greatest enemy, or of any kraal where he suspects magic is being used against him. He chews medicines on various occasions, and spits in the same way, to avert mischief. A wounded warrior may go through a purification ceremony, part of which is spitting upon sticks, pointing at the enemy, and then throwing the sticks in that direction. Comparing this with the spitting upon a stick and placing it with a prayer upon the *issivivane* heap, it would appear to be an offering to the protective ancestor spirit of every Kaffir, accompanied with a prayer for vengeance upon his enemy. Mr. Kidd's theory that an explosion of contempt is at the bottom of all spitting rites does not fairly explain the data already cited.

The dead often appear to the Zulu in dreams, and such dreams are thought likely to make him ill. In that case the

³⁹ Leland, *Etruscan Roman Remains*, 318 note.

⁴⁰ Kay, *Travels and Researches in Caffraria*, 186-7; Callaway, *op. cit.*, 435; Kidd, *Savage Childhood*, 16; *The Essential Kaffir*, 9, 10, 308-10.

patient must take herbs prescribed by the doctor, and if the dream comes again he must chew them, spit the juice on a piece of firewood, or a stone, and throw them over his shoulder not looking back. This seems again the *issiwivani* custom, an offering to the shade, respectfully avoiding the sight of it. Or the person tormented with such dreams may chew the prescribed herbs and deposit the spittle and stone in a hole he has dug in some remote place. The dream supposedly will not return.⁴¹

When such minor offerings are not accepted, the patient may be compelled to kill an ox for the ancestral shades. It is to be understood that the stone is a "dummy" offering, in lieu of a real or more substantial one, just as the Moslem may use dust or sand in place of water in his ablutions—a substitution known also in early Christian baptismal rites, when water was scarce. In precisely similar cairn ceremonies the Tibetan to-day will offer a stone when he has no sheep's head, and a handful of dust in place of a libation of wine.⁴² That the ghost demanding bread was usually satisfied with a stone was doubtless in mind in Matt. vii. 9, perhaps also in iv. 3. When the New Caledonians lack fish for offerings they will use sacred stones instead, laying them before the ancestral skulls, chewing leaves, and spitting on the stones, saying "Help us to be lucky at our fishing."⁴³ The spitting upon such dummy offerings, however, might possibly be classified under the first division of this paper, as infusing a spirit or *anima* into any object by spitting on it. The Kaffirs when sacrificing an ox to ancestral spirits shut the meat up in a hut all night, that the shades may "lick" the meat, absorbing its "spirit" so; the earthly family then eat the meat the next day. A similar view of

⁴¹ Callaway, *op. cit.*, 66, 160, 316-317, 435.

⁴² Sarat Chandra Das, *Journey to Lhasa*, 190.

⁴³ Frazer, *Magic Art*, I, 163.

the gods or ancestral shades as "spirit eaters" is familiar in Polynesia.⁴⁴

IV.

More familiar to the general reader is the belief in the healing power of spittle. Primitive man could not fail to observe that an injured wild beast was apt to lick its wounds, and the notion of healing was promptly associated with this habit. So in the famous parable of Dives and Lazarus the oriental beggar, lacking better treatment, allowed the dogs to lick his sores, partly perhaps because of the semi-sacred character attaching to the dog in the ancient world. That wounds in the mouth heal much more quickly than elsewhere, has not escaped the attention of the Oriental enthusiast, and the fact is directly attributed to the saliva. Mr. Oliphant, watching dervishes run skewers through the cheeks without effusion of blood and with only a slight scar, sought for an explanation, and was told that it was due to the healing power of saliva and to the chewing of certain herbs, probably styptic. After making due allowance for all impostures the fact remains that mouth-injuries are in special favor with such enthusiasts.⁴⁵ In medical journals I have seen the suggestion that the presence of some beneficial microbes may explain the rapid healing of injuries to the mouth.

But animals do not merely lick; some have the trick of spitting at a wound. Crawford observes that the baboon, familiar all over Africa, will spit on the wound of a companion and rub it with a bit of bark. Livingstone observed similar behavior on the part of the soko in the grassy plains of the Manyuema country, staunching the flow of blood with leaves.⁴⁶ The baboon's renown as a rain maker or

⁴⁴ Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, I, 302-3.

⁴⁵ *The Land of Gilead*, 350-355.

⁴⁶ *Thinking Black*, 143; *Last Journals*, 325.

finder of water in time of drought has been already mentioned; adding this curious behavior, the animal's repute all over Africa as a physician or wizard of vast powers is easily understood. The possession of a baboon skin is in consequence a *sine qua non* with some would-be healers. That spitting should become a chief feature of the savage's healing of a wound, as with the Bushman,⁴⁷ is not surprising; and it is just as natural that especial value should attach to the spitting of men of supposed exceptional powers. So Mohammed in his healing, according to Ayesha, habitually used clay made with spittle,⁴⁸ and in Palestine the healing of wounds, burns, diseased feet, and serpent bites by the spittle of dervishes, maniacs, epileptics, and other holy men is a matter of every day occurrence.⁴⁹ Vespasian at Alexandria was besought to touch the blind with his spittle, and the lame with his foot, and by the aid of Jupiter Serapis, both were cured; so Tacitus and Suetonius tell us. The spitting upon the eyes of a blind man and anointing with clay, is familiar to every reader of the New Testament (Mark viii. 23, John ix. 6). Of the Arabian desert, Doughty reports, "A young mother, yet a slender girl, brought her wretched babe and bade me spit on the child's sore eyes; this ancient Semitic opinion and custom I have afterwards found wherever I came in Arabia. Her gossips followed, to make this request with her, and when I blamed their superstition, they answered simply that such was the custom here from time out of mind. Meteyr nomads have brought me, some of them bread and some of them salt, that I should spit in it for their sick friends. Also the Arabians will spit upon a lock which cannot easily be opened. "They also spit on, or at, malicious *jan*, or spirits; and a father will often say to his infant in arms,

⁴⁷ Chapman, *op. cit.*, 160.

⁴⁸ Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, 658.

⁴⁹ Bliss, *op. cit.*, 265-271; Grant, *The Peasantry of Palestine*, 94.

“Spit upon *bàbu*—spit, my darling!”—involving the notion of blessing or favor so familiar in Africa.⁵⁰ William Hayes Ward was appealed to for aid for a sick child, on the lower Euphrates. In the opinion of the Sheikh who so appealed, his task was not complete till he spit upon the child.⁵¹ The North African nomad holds like views; spit in a child’s face, and the parents esteem it a great favor;⁵² and similar opinions survive in the folklore of Europe.⁵³

All the practices we have noted are equally familiar in North America. Spirits of the dead make men ill by spitting or blowing in their faces; and the *shaman* would cure them by the same process.

Huichol worshipers purifying themselves before Grandfather Fire hold out their palms to him, then spit on them and rub quickly over their joints, legs and shoulders. Shamans follow the same method in healing. If deer hairs, foretoking success in the hunt, are found in the grass gathered for thatching the fire-temple, the shaman graciously spits on them before returning them to the lucky finder. When straw effigies of opossums are placed on the conical roof as guardians of the temple, the shaman and his assistant spit on them repeatedly and prayerfully. When placing a “prayer stone” on a wayside cairn to gain new strength for the journey, the person placing it first spits on it. When some one has been made sick through witchcraft, the doctor finds out the sorcerer and comes to terms with him, and the sorcerer makes himself invisible and goes to the patient and rubs spittle in the armpit, thus curing him.⁵⁴

In Europe also, survivals of various uses of spittle in

⁵⁰ *Arabia Deserta*, I, 527; II, 164.

⁵¹ Peters, *Nippur*, I, 350.

⁵² Hesse-Wartegg, *Tunis*, 253.

⁵³ *Folktales of the Magyars*, LXV.

⁵⁴ Lumholtz, *Unknown Mexico*, I, 381; II, 40, 41, 239, 265, 267, 282, 354.

healing are known. Black⁵⁵ cites its usefulness against the evil eye, as a cure for warts, as an ingredient of salves, as part of the cure for gout or rheumatism, for healing sore eyes, and as an agency for killing scorpions among various peoples—some of these prescriptions being with incantations and some without.

V.

Adding to this widespread primitive reverential spitting and its use in healing, the equally wide-spread theory of disease, and we have the key to the notion of contempt associated with spitting among more advanced peoples. Since all disease is caused by evil spirits the healing by spittle is directly a rite of exorcism, and where mystic spells are read for the purpose of healing they may alternate with spitting.⁵⁶ So in China spitting on the sick, on those in a swoon or mad, is an excellent way to expel the obsessing spirit or indwelling specter. Or the performer may blow upon them, or spirt water upon them, preferably in the face.⁵⁷ Slatin Pasha⁵⁸ tells how a Bornu doctor undertook to cure his headache by pressing the temples with thumb and forefinger, muttering pious texts and spitting in Slatin's face, getting knocked down for his pains by the unappreciative patient who could not understand that the disease was the work of the devil who must be driven out by spitting. Thompson reports a rite of exorcism witnessed at Mosul: a knife was laid on the patient's head, dates were brought in and fumigated with incense during the incantations, the magician then spit upon them and gave them to the patient to eat.⁵⁹ This was probably sending into the man a more powerful spirit to expel the mischievous intruder.

⁵⁵ *Folk Medicine*, 184-5.

⁵⁶ Doughty, *op. cit.*, I, 314.

⁵⁷ De Groot, *Religion of the Chinese*, 54.

⁵⁸ *Fire and Sword in the Soudan*, 25.

⁵⁹ *Semitic Magic*, 107.

Spitting at a passing jinn, or at an obstinate lock, already mentioned, may be compared with the Danakil belief. A camel having gotten loose in the night, the Danakil owner concluded that the devil was in the cord with which the animal had been tied. So the cord was rolled in the hands while spells were muttered, and the cord was spit upon at the close of each spell. The devii having unquestionably been expelled, the cord was delivered to a lad to seek and bring back the lost camel.⁶⁰ But the European unbeliever is sure to suffer many things among people who hate the devil so heartily. Mrs. Stevens tells us that a devout Soudanese Mohammedan, compelled by the infidel Frank to cook swine's flesh, was discovered devoutly spitting upon the accursed ham, before bringing it in to breakfast.⁶¹ In the same kitchen a cook who sometimes frothed at the mouth was so completely under the control of a demon that his frightened fellows unskilled in exorcism dared not enter the kitchen, but stood outside till he handed them the finished dishes.⁶² More fear and less esteem of spirit obsession is apparent here than in Palestine or Arabia.

In the same class with exorcism of evil agencies by spitting is the destruction of them by the same means. Folk-tales abound in such instances. In Japan we find the legend that when the great teacher Kobo Daishi was attacked by a dragon, he spat upon it and killed it.⁶³ In Morocco "not long ago, when swarms of locusts ravaged the gardens of Tangiers, the shereef of Wazam expelled the intruders by spitting in the mouth of one of them."⁶⁴

But where the notion of healing by spitting becomes dominant, and the spitting salutation yields to other conventions or is slightly modified, the formal spitting upon

⁶⁰ Harris, *Highlands of Ethiopia*, I, 247.

⁶¹ *My Soudan Year*, 29.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶³ Lloyd, *The Creed of Half Japan*, 245.

⁶⁴ Westermarck, *Origin and Development of Moral Ideas*, 255.

a healthy person comes to be construed as an accusation of secret illness, sorcery or demon possession, and as such is promptly resented. It is familiar in Africa that a "witch doctor" makes his accusation often at the peril of his own life and must immediately flee from the fury of the accused party and his family. This is characteristic of only the more advanced stages of culture, however. The universal prejudice against an alien or stranger, or one of another cultus, makes all such to be construed as unclean, spirit-possessed persons, and prophylactic spitting and muttering of prayers, curses, or spells, is resorted to by those who think themselves in peril.

Thus in New Guinea certain tribes disinfect a party of suspicious strangers by whispering or muttering an incantation over the branch of a tree, striking each visitor on the back with it and spitting upon him, then burying the branch.⁶⁵ The rite naturally becomes associated with the feelings of the spitter, and the supposed uncleanness or inferiority of the person spit at. This explains the curious mingling of customs in Semitic lands, for instance. In Is. 1. 6 the exiled servant of Yahveh says he "hid not his face from shame and spitting," yet in Babylonia, as already cited, the priestly exorcist acquired his powers by having his own mouth spit into. So in Numbers xii. 14, Miriam is spoken of as liable to be thrust out of camp seven days if her father had spit in her face; but this probably does not mean that she is defiled by such spitting, but that such spitting is an announcement that she is defiled or obsessed by some spirit, the spitting being part of the exorcising rite. So also the *levir* who fails in duty is probably defiled thereby. Does the injured party cleanse him? (Deut. xxv. 9).

The mixed association remains to this day throughout all Semitic peoples, as already shown. One may spit at

⁶⁵ Frazer, *Taboos and Perils of the Soul*, 109.

a Frank as a mark of horror, fear, or contempt, or he may bring his child and request the Frank to spit upon it. All depends upon the personal estimate of the Frank prevailing at the time. The protective powers of spittle are the same in either case. Quite curious to us seems the fact that the familiar institution of *dakhil* or "taking refuge" with a powerful protector may take the form of spitting upon him, if he pass near enough to the suppliant.⁶⁶ It was probably a formal blessing or solemn adjuration of primitive times, to which the party appealed to dared not be indifferent. The same institution is found in Central Africa. Among the Bambarra a condemned criminal is safe if he can spit upon a passing chieftain, and the latter must thereafter support him as well.⁶⁷

VI.

That attention should be given to the probably ceremonial cleanliness of the person spitting is a clear and logical inference from the data cited. This is true in the Old Testament. There is no Levitical regulation against spitting in general, nor any intimation that all spittle is unclean, but an unclean person cannot spit upon a clean one without rendering him unclean (Lev. xv. 8). His spittle is temporarily impure. Catarrhal spittle is widely deemed unclean. The Babylonian priestly exorcist already cited claims that it is the "pure" spittle of Ea that has inspired him. Gudea, in one of his inscriptions, says that in his religious purifications he gathered up the impure spittle from the streets. A modern board of health would gladly give him employment. In a curative incantation over a dough figure, a Babylonian exorcist says,

"That the spittle which has been spat
May be poured forth like water,

⁶⁶ Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon*, 317.

⁶⁷ Westermarck, *Op. cit.*, II, 637.

That the magic (?) which mingled with the spat forth spittle
May be turned back."⁶⁸

This may possibly mean that the evil effects of the spittle that wrought the mischief were due to its impurity; but it can not be certainly maintained. Shylock says to Antonio, "You did void your rheum upon my beard"; suggesting that Shakespeare knew the peculiar uncleanness of catarrhal spittle. Marcellus gives a cure for sore eyes, in which the mere spitting has acquired special precautions. Take the saliva of a woman who has born only male children, and has abstained from cohabitation and pungent foods three days. Then, if her spittle is bright and clear (not catarrhal) anoint the diseased eyes with it, and they will be cured. In modern Italy you must take the saliva and some of the milk of a woman who has born a seven-months child and anoint the sore eyes with the mixture, make the sign of the cross on the eyes, then spit thrice behind you, repeating a certain formula as you anoint. This must be repeated three mornings fasting. Again in a cure for gout, given by Marcellus, it is said "Poison is conquered by poison; fasting spittle can not be conquered." The healer must say this thrice, and spit each time on the soles or footprints of him who is to be cured. The spittle of a boy baby is in another formula prescribed as sure to be clean and pure, and it is used in the same way.⁶⁹

VII.

It will be recognized that it is not possible in considering the mass of surviving spitting rites to point out unerringly the exact stage of thought or custom in which a given ceremony arose. For instance, cases already cited of spitting in connection with a prayer or desire to be avenged on one's enemy are slightly different from the

⁶⁸ Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia*, 108.

⁶⁹ Leland, *Etruscan-Roman Remains*, 279-80; 296-97.

spitting of exorcism at a suspicious stranger. The first may be a primitive form of worship of a higher power, while invoking aid; the second may be only reliance upon some supposed mysterious powers of the saliva. Yet either may explain the custom of spitting on hearing the mention of a name or a deed of ill omen. In Scotland, for instance, some family names are names to spit at, and quite frequently it does not imply clan feud or personal hatred.⁷⁰ An Australian black may spit excitedly, if he learns he has inadvertently mentioned the name of a dead person; an Abyssinian may strive to spit and scrape off his tongue an oath he wished to abjure; and I have known an English miner to spit excitedly at unwelcome news or names. With the spitting of imprecation would be classed the Ovambo habit of cursing or bewitching an absent one by gazing at a pool of water (crystal-gazing) until the form of the man appears—then spitting at it and pronouncing the curse.⁷¹ The other African data suggest that the spitting here is an invocation or obeisance to the patron ancestor. Invocation of a primitive earth-mother appears in some African religious rites and folk-lore, so that the belief that a rain-maker can raise a storm by spitting on the ground⁷² would appear to belong to that type.

Exorcism again is suggested by the Atlas Berber who spat upon the coin Professor Westermarck gave him, to counteract the effect of any evil magic that might be in the Frank's coin.⁷³ But in northern Europe the fear of ill luck or misfortune takes the particular form of fear of losing that coin. So in northern England any money supposed to be received from a witch must be put into the mouth, or else the witch may spirit it away, and leave only a stone in its place. Another form of statement is that if

⁷⁰ *Folk-Lore*, VI, 170.

⁷¹ Frazer, *Magic Art*, 163.

⁷² Callaway, *op. cit.*, 409.

⁷³ Westermarck, *op. cit.*, I, 594.

you spit on the first money you receive in your day's trading, you will be lucky in the day's business.⁷⁴

This notion that productive power is imparted by spittle has an amusing illustration in Mr. Thomson's experience in Masai Land.⁷⁵ The natives were greatly impressed with the strange white man and his powers, and at length an elderly important fellow came with his young wife and stated that they had decided that it would be a fine thing to have a little white boy of their own. Thomson argued that it was best to leave such things to Ngai (god, or patron ancestor). But they made it plain that they had much more confidence in him than in Ngai. Thomson got out of his difficulty by administering a magic potion, effervescing fruit salt, and spitting liberally all over the would-be mother. His friendship being demonstrated in orthodox Masai fashion, his fame spread, and his spitting powers were sorely taxed during the remainder of his stay in the land.

Creative power turns up in some later myths and folklore; as in India, for example. Agni, the fire-god, is said to have tried to conceal himself in the waters. Failing in this, he spat upon them, and three divinities sprang forth. Another legend of Tvashtri, the creator of seed, declares that he spat upon the head of a sacrificial victim, and that his spittle became the brain, and the marrow of the neckbone, which some Hindu theories identify with the soul or spirit.⁷⁶ It would appear that in ancient India, as in modern Africa, spitting on the head of a sacrificial victim was a familiar custom.

From some of the data considered, the question is fairly raised whether spitting salutations are not the ancestor of kissing. This latter custom is far from universal. It is

⁷⁴ Henderson, *op. cit.*, 32, 181.

⁷⁵ *Through Masai-Land*, 288-290.

⁷⁶ *Sacred Books of the East*, XII, 47; XXVI, 266.

⁷⁷ *Savage Africa*, 163.

not an African custom, where spitting salutations are prevalent and protruding lip and nose rings common. Reade tells us an amusing story of a negro princess's fright at being kissed the first time. She imagined this strange wetting with the lips was preparatory to devouring her.⁷⁷ East African pledges of friendship or brotherhood we have seen may take the form of spitting in each other's mouths, while a "holy" Arab may spit in the mouth of a neophyte, which custom reappears in some old rituals in the Christian church as kissing the neophyte. A friend who has taken part in American Indian dances tells me of some in which the dancers are paired, each carrying a pebble in the mouth which at a given stage of the dance the partners exchange. The spectators would call it kissing, though the red man as a race is not a kissing animal. In the salutations of the moon, previously mentioned, spitting in the hand and waving at the moon seems identical with kissing the hand to the moon; or, as I have seen spitting over the right shoulder on seeing the new moon. So the kissing of "peace" between two Arabs who meet may be the direct descendant of the exchange of spittle between two covenanting savages. Animals may have taught man something worth while, though the process was a long one!

Another by-form of this primitive salutation and mode of healing probably exists in the world-wide practice of shamans and magicians of "sucking out" a disease, exhibiting then some object as proof of their powers. To the primitive patient the power of a holy man's spittle is irrefutably demonstrated by such tricks. The American boy is not the first who has spit upon his bait in hopes of piscatorial success, and the modern mother who says to her child "Let me kiss it to make it well" has at least the authority of an immemorial past for her proposal.